

DUANE ANDERSON AND DARLA LESLIE
UPPER SOURIS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
AUGUST 6, 2002 BY PHIL HILL

MR. HILL: I am visiting with Duane Anderson. It is August 6, 2002. We are at the Headquarters of the Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge. Duane has been very helpful in giving us a lot of information about the Refuge. He turned over a key to me. We spent two days, or a day and a half at least, seeing all of this. I wanted to talk to Duane a little bit about his experiences with the Service. Duane, you told me yesterday that you have been the Service about twenty years, is that correct?

MR. ANDERSON: That's correct. I started in November of 1977, right here. And this is the only Refuge I have even been on. I've had a chance to transfer a couple of times but I turned that down for some personal reasons. I am not sorry that I turned those down. This has been a real good area for me, and a good State to live in. Obviously, I am very partial to this Refuge so I've been here my entire career.

MR. HILL: You were a schoolteacher before you [joined the Service], what did you teach in school?

MR. ANDERSON: That's correct. I taught high school Science for seven years in the Minot Public School System. I taught Physical Science and Biology.

MR. HILL: I noticed that your title is Biological Technician and Refuge Officer. So you are a Biologist?

MR. ANDERSON: Well, a lot of people that work for the Fish and Wildlife Service are biologists by nature and by their education. However, there are a lot of them that have different titles than Biologists. You know, the Refuge Manager is a Biologist. The Assistant Manager is Biologist. There are strictly biologists with that as their main title. Mine is Biological Technician, although I do have a degree in Biology.

MR. HILL: What are some of the highlights of your twenty-five years with the Service, that you can think about?

MR. ANDERSON: Oh boy! You know, I had a real lot of good experiences out here, Phil. Early on in my career, I got involved with more biology than I do right now. Times have changed. My job description had changed. My duties have changed. We did a lot of different types of biology than we do now. We spent a lot more time in the field actually counting and doing surveys on ducks, geese and some of the deer, beaver and different creatures like that. So, I spent an awful lot of time in the field. However, the style of biology has changed right now. There's more studies going on. The GPS system

has entered in to vegetation studies probably more than anything. Like a tell a lot of people and some of the students, and the school kids that if you have good habitat out there, the wildlife will do pretty well. We are right now in a mode of dealing more with habitat, and survey work, grassland and timber management, and things like that. As far as some of the other highlights in my career, I have always wanted to do Law Enforcement. And they sent me to our Training Academy in 1980. I have been Refuge Office, slash Game Warden, slash Federal Officer, however you want to label it since that time. I have been involved in a lot of different Law Enforcement activities over the years. There is a real need out there for law enforcement to protect the resources. There's a lot of folks out there that use the resource above and beyond what they should legally do, or can legally do. And it's up to Law Enforcement, whether they are State or Federal people, to work on this problem. It's a problem that isn't going away and hasn't gotten a whole lot better. You know, I thought 'I'm going to clean up this place' when I came on in 1980 as a Refuge Officer. And I haven't been able to do it and I probably won't before my career ends. So, I've really enjoyed the law enforcement end of it, and the early years in the biology end of it.

A third highlight, these aren't necessarily in order Phil, but I get involved in a lot of water management. There's a lot of water moving through the Souris Valley, the Souris River. The drainage starts up in Canada. There is a huge portion of the drainage basin up in Canada. We've had some horrendous floods in this valley starting in 1969. There have been several of them since then. We do a lot of water management here, not only for the wildlife and the Refuges, including the J. Clark Salyer Refuge, but we have to manage water in order to lessen impacts on downstream landowners in the city of Minot and Velva and some of the other cities that are on the river. If we have a winter where is a lot of snow, and a lot of run-off is predicted, between the Refuge Manager and myself we spend a great deal of time on water management. That's a very big challenge. It's interesting and I enjoy that a lot as well. We've had some huge flood control projects that have occurred, construction-wise, as far as rebuilding Lake Darling Dam and some other projects on the river that I have been involved with over the years. That's been exciting; to watch our water management capabilities grow plus helping to reduce the impacts from high flow, and high run-off years. It impacts not only the Refuge, but the folks that live in the valley as well. The early years in biology, my law enforcement career, and water management have been things that I have really enjoyed.

MR. HILL: In your law enforcement duties, are you saying that there are substantial numbers of people who come in here and hunt and fish illegally?

MR. ANDERSON: I wouldn't call it, "substantial". We probably have, well; we do have the highest public use of any Refuge in the State of North Dakota. But, there are instances where there has been illegal hunting of one sort or another; failure to tag deer, hunting birds of any sort on the Refuge when they aren't supposed to be, 'sneaking' in to the Refuge is I guess a term that is kind of common. They sneak in to retrieve an animal

that they have probably shot. There's a lot of fishing on the lake and in the river. There is 'over-limiting' taking place because we are a very good fishing lake. People have taken over their limits. There is fishing without a license once in a while. We have a lot of boating activity, mainly associated with fishing of course. There are some problems with life jackets and different boating violations. Then there are some of the other common problems like littering, vehicle violations as far as reckless driving, dogs off of leashes and just some common problems. I don't want to overlook some of the more serious ones, but there are a lot more of these common, everyday little problems than people really think sometimes.

MR. HILL: We talked to Darla a little bit about the use of volunteers. And we know from fact that my wife and I both volunteer at NCTC. We are interested in that. Darla indicated that she sort of manages certain things for volunteers. Would she be the 'Volunteer Coordinator', if there is one? Do you work with volunteers?

MR. ANDERSON: I work with volunteers quite a bit Phil. In the early years I spent quite a bit of time working with some Sportsmen's Clubs that came out here to do different projects and help us. I still do that on occasion, although we don't seem to have the participation from Sportsmen's Clubs that we did at one time. We do have individuals that do want to volunteer. You met Marshall Hill yesterday. He is one of our volunteers. He has been a steady volunteer for several years. He comes out and works on the Wood duck box project for us. He'll volunteer for other things. We have several stand-byes, I guess. When you call them, they'll come and help you, or, if they have time they'll come and work with you. Tom Pabian[sic?], the Assistant Refuge Manager has worked with some of the student volunteers. These are kids that are going to college, majoring in Wildlife Management. They come out here for the summer and volunteer. They don't get no wages. We take care of their room and board. They volunteer their time to get some good experience. Tom has worked with them. In a sense, we've all worked with volunteers at one time or another. We don't have a specific 'volunteer coordinator' but I do work quite a bit with the volunteers.

MR. HILL: Now, where these college students spend the summer; is that where you showed us yesterday down by the shed and the house, and those trailers down there?

MR. ANDERSON: Yes, that's where we house the student volunteers down there. They are mobile homes, but they are very nice and some of these students welcome a nice place to live in the summer time. We get a lot of work out of them. We interview for these people. They apply for these jobs, the students volunteers do. Not every student that calls and wants to volunteer gets a position. There is some competition out there, and that is good.

MR. HILL: You've been in the Service for twenty-five years. Carla was saying that she's been working here as a volunteer, one time when her husband came up here in the Air Force. How long have Tom and Dean been in the Service, do you know?

MR. ANDERSON: Dean has been here since about 1985, I believe. There is a plaque out here on the wall that will clarify that for me. He's been here since about 1985. Tom has been here I believe about six years.

MR. HILL: So, you're the 'senior' guy in terms of service?

MR. ANDERSON: I guess I am the "senior" person out here. Although our Maintenance Man who is on sick leave right now, has been here longer than I have. That's fairly common, however, with the Maintenance positions. They spend their entire career here. So I guess, in a sense I am the senior person here in the office, yeah.

MR. HILL: One thing that has intrigued me is, and from reviewing the CCC reports, that there was a tremendous amount of workmen doing rip-rap [?] work around here. I have noticed riprap work around bridges and different places around the lake. How much, or, do you know if any of that rip-rap work is the same sixty or sixty-five years ago?

MR. ANDERSON: No, it has not all been replaced, Phil. There are portions of embankments and spillway areas leading up to some of these water control structures that are still original riprap. Although, on Lake Darling dam, there has been a lot of it added over the years because of the damages from water. Some of our smaller dams still have the original riprap in place. It amazes me to this day, the construction of some of those facilities; the dams. The work that was done and is still in place after all this time. When you think about the time frame, from the mid 1930's to today. That's a long time for concrete and riprap and rock to withstand the elements of North Dakota. There are several of those places that are original. I could almost guarantee it, because nothing has ever been disturbed or changed since I have been here. So yeah, it is true.

MR. HILL: Another thing; when I was reading the reports, I got tired of looking at all of the amount of time that they spent on the truck trails. You know, working on truck trails. Having driven around here yesterday and today, I am so thankful they did all that! Because.... [Both men laughing]

MR. ANDERSON: There are a lot of trails on the Refuge. I can't even tell you how many miles. It's got to be close to one hundred miles of trails on the Refuge. Of course, you are familiar with the type of equipment that they used to build those things. A lot of it was just a plain old shovel, and some horse-drawn equipment like a small scraper, and small trucks of all sorts. Some of those roads are original. We may have done some repairs as far as culverts, and maybe a little gravel. But a lot of the roads that you have

driven on are original grades. It's the only way to get around the Refuge and do some management, law enforcement and surveys. I don't know how else we'd do it.

MR. HILL: I know that we couldn't have done very much without them.

MR. ANDERSON: No.

MR. HILL: I know that you are pressed for time. This has been a fabulous experience for us. And I just wondered if there was anything that we haven't talked about. I know that you could talk about a lot more things that we have covered. But if there is something else that you would like to say, please do.

MR. ANDERSON: I've talked a lot about the Refuge and my career here, and the things that have been done over the years. Getting back to your favorite subject of course, the CCC; there is a lot of interest in the CCC program. We do get quite a few visitors, primarily in the summer obviously. They are people who worked here in the CCC days, helping to build the Refuge. They come out here and look at some of the projects that they probably worked on. Of course, they want to talk about the changes and things that have happened here. If you have a lot of time, I am sure that there is folks in the area that you could interview and talk to that worked on the project. There is an organization within the State that have reunions every year.

MR. HILL: There's a national organization of the CCC alumni. I have looked at their web page.

MR. ANDERSON: There's folks within the state of course that are part of that and they organize some of these reunions that they occasionally have. One of my goals is that I would like to develop more displays and set up more photos. You know, the old photos of the days of the construction. I just don't have time right now with everything else that's going on at the Refuge. Maybe when I retire I can come back and volunteer and put together some displays about the history of the Refuge. It intrigues me when I look through the files and old photos of some of these things. There are binders that have all of the information from all of the documents that you have worked with. And there are folks that come in that want to talk about this. There is a lot of historians out there. And being that the Refuge was built in the 1930's with the CCC program, they are extremely interested, and I would like to be able to provide them with more knowledge and more photos and more documentation if I could. Maybe when I retire, Phil.

MR. HILL: Hopefully! I bet that's a long time. The fellow that we talked to in Mohall who helped us to know where the camp was said that there were four people from Mohall that worked in the CCC. And fortunately, they are still alive and still living there. This man I talked to was a little bit older than I am, but he couldn't remember any of their

names. So I didn't have a chance, and I really didn't have time to go with them. We just wanted to see more of the Refuge.

MR. ANDERSON: Well, if you have time, I am sure there are some older folks in the area that could provide you with more information and more names. You'll have to come back another time and set that up.

MR. HILL: I would like to. Let me close with this; thank you very much for all you've done. I appreciate your helping us yesterday. We've had a wonderful visit. The birds look awfully happy!

MR. ANDERSON: Well, we hope they are!

MR. HILL: I think that you are successful in that regard. There sure are a lot of them.

MR. ANDERSON: Yeah, this is a busy time of the year for us, and it's going to get busier with the fall migration coming on. So there are going to be a lot more birds around than you see now. But with the drought the way it is in this area, a lot of the birds come back to the Refuge and the lake and river since adjoining wetlands dry up and the only place they find water is on the Refuge. That's one of the reasons you are seeing a lot of birds.

MR. HILL: Well thank you very much for your time.

[Mr. Hill begins to speak with another individual identified as Darla]

MR. HILL: What ever you want to say. This is another very brief interview. She looks like she's busy with Darla. I don't know her last name, but she's been at the Refuge for about two and a half years. She is originally from southeastern North Dakota and Minnesota, and her husband is in the Air Force. Do you want to tell us just very briefly, about your experiences working here at the Refuge?

MRS. LESLIE: I am Darla Leslie, and as you say, I have been here about two years in this position. I am currently the Administrative Assistant here, so I am doing a lot of budget and payroll. I also get into the public use end of things. I do some talks for schools. One of the things I have really worked on for the last couple of years is developing an International Migratory Bird Day event. Last year was the first year that I did it. I had about thirty people here all day. This year, 2002, I did it again and I had about two to three hundred people here.

MR. HILL: Oh my goodness!

MRS. LESLIE: So, that went really well for the second year. Prior to being in this position, I was a temporary 1040-hour employee. So, I was out on the Fence Crew. I helped with Botulism checks and did some of the biological survey work. I also did trail maintenance, public use, and whatever happened to come up at the time. It's been a good refuge to work at. I've enjoyed my time here and I anticipate that I will be here for some time longer.

MR. HILL: Now how long is your husband going to be stationed at the Air Force base?

MRS. LESLIE: I told my husband that we're not moving! [Laughing]

MR. HILL: Oh, I see. I hadn't heard that one before!

MRS. LESLIE: No, he's close to retirement. He's got twenty-two years in, so when they lift stop loss, he could retire anytime. Based on that, we've kind of set roots down here in this area. I don't plan on going anywhere.

MR. HILL: I've met you just briefly here, but he isn't going to go anywhere without you, I can tell you that! I can sense that. And with that International Migratory Bird Day, you went from how many people?

MRS. LESLIE: I had about thirty people here the first year. And I had two hundred to three hundred people here in 2002. That was just the tip of the iceberg. I actually had planned for a whole weeklong event and had school classes scheduled to come out the whole week. We got ten inches of very wet, sticky snow so most of my schools cancelled. So that was just the numbers that I had on Saturday. My staff that was here, everybody was just floored. They didn't expect that many people to be here that day.

MR. HILL: There's one thing I meant to ask Duane about. In the old CCC records at one time they had a Duck Hospital. Do you have any idea where or what it was?

MRS. LESLIE: I do not.

MR. HILL: When they started, they had a lot of ducks that had botulism. And they had some that were injured and various other things, so they set up some pens, in effect, in parts of the lake, or around the ponds where they keep the ducks until they were able to get out on their own. They are very proud of the records that they have of the recoveries.

MRS. LESLIE: I hadn't heard anything about that.

MR. HILL: Well, I'll let you get back to work because I know you want to home.

MRS. LESLIE: Yeah, actually I have to close and get my butt on the road. I have to pick my daughter up at daycare.

MR. HILL: How many children do you have?

MRS. LESLIE: I have one, and she is twenty-one months old. So we're busy.

MR. HILL: You are! So I'll leave you alone. And thank you!